

ary Sciences

ALA

VOLUME 35 NO. 3

MARCH 1942

THE
LIBRARY ASSISTANT

The Official Journal
of the Association of
Assistant Librarians

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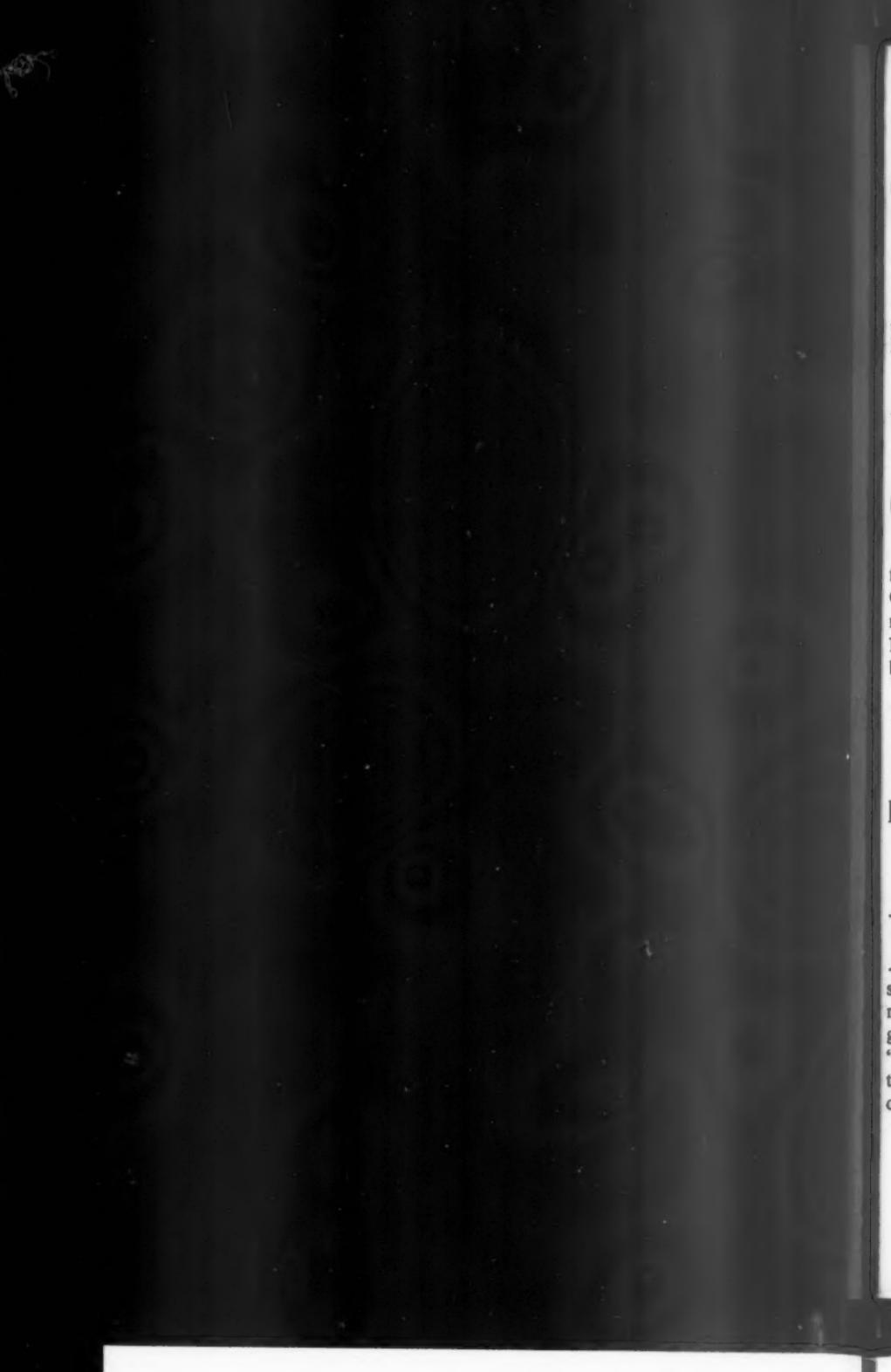
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THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE
ASSOCIATION OF ASSISTANT LIBRARIANS
(*Section of the Library Association*)

HON. EDITOR: W. B. STEVENSON Hornsey Public Libraries

Announcements

CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

COURSES, in all sections, are arranged each season to run from April to May of the following year, and from November to December of the following year.

Students wishing to enter for any course must obtain an application form and send it, together with the necessary fee, to Mr. S. W. Martin, Carnegie Library, Herne Hill Road, London, S.E.24. Applications must reach the above before 20th March and 20th October for the April and November courses respectively. After these dates no applications will be considered.

For full particulars of subjects and fees, see the *Library Association Year Book*.



Future Conditional

Lewis Halsey

"War is a paradox, a vicious spiral, a dilemma with ingrowing horns."

IS there a sequel to "Sad Standards"?¹ A letter from a friend asks this question, and leads me to ask myself whether I have anything further to say. And, of course, I have. I started many hares; and said some things I can't agree with now. But I said, *inter alia*: "this war may very likely threaten intellectual standards increasingly as it progresses . . ."; and of those of us who are serving in the Forces I said "they may come back insensitive morons." I would retract neither of these statements, though I would modify the latter: after nearly two years of the army, intellectual activity of the least profound kind has become an

¹ LIBRARY ASSISTANT, Oct., 1940.

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effort. Music remains the one aesthetic pleasure which gives me deep satisfaction; poetry and the pleasures of prose style, visual and plastic art have lost something of their old magic.

One is coarser in grain; one responds less to more subtle stimuli; one is more receptive to suggestion, perhaps, less original in thinking. The effect of army life seems likely to induce lassitude, dispersal of mental energies, rather glum least-resistance escapism (especially excessive smoking and drinking)—in fact, a general “passivity” which tends to worry one at first, but on examination may be ultimately for the best. Passivity is, perhaps, more wholesome than either a constantly thwarted intellectual striving or wholehearted acceptance of the extensive substitute-living machinery provided. The last course would inevitably bring us back after the war “insensitive morons,” whereas our passivity (unless, indeed, it had become a habit) could be shaken off, and the furniture of a civilized life again assembled. I live not too unhappily in that hope.

To offset the above rather gloomy picture we have Mr. Alfred Ogilvie, who brightly remarks that we will emerge “from an experience which cannot fail to alter our outlook, and we will see things with a clearer vision.” Exactly half of which statement is probably true; but I cannot believe that seeing things differently necessarily means seeing them more clearly. But perhaps Mr. Ogilvie is an airman, who

“will watch the hawk with an indifferent eye
Or pitifully . . .”

This vague exuberance needs crystallization: though one must keep a sharp eye on the impulse to self-dramatization which servicemen-writers have to contend with. What exactly have we gained from service life?

First of all, let me ignore the cynical two-year veteran in me, and say that the army is a valuable experience, that I don’t regret it at all, and that I should be sorry not to have had the opportunity. I am convinced that the impact of service life has brought about valuable personal adjustments and revaluations socially, politically, and culturally.

That one concentrates a lifetime of social experience (by which I mean experience of people individually and *en masse*) into one’s army career is very obvious, although some people seem not to realize it. One is brought into compulsory daily contact with a large and frequently changing number of men and women of all kinds: the most unlikely people have to live together and adjust themselves to each other, and one result of this will at least be the *ability* to live together. Mutual sympathy, a wearin

¹ *Library Association Record*, Nov., 1941.

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away of class distinction (up to a point) and more tolerance (also up to a point) are possibilities. Post-war events and a resumption of civilian living will no doubt nullify a good deal of the possible good results of service life. People may be only too glad socially to disintegrate; to live less communally and more individually. But some of us, at any rate, will never be able to go back to our isolated, lofty, well-nourished pre-war niches. That is one very positive gain. Whether the political lessons of service life will be learnt and acted on it would be rash to prophesy: they are many and contradictory; on the whole it is doubtful if the extremely conventional, shallow, and tractable "average man" is able directly to apprehend these lessons. Of political discussion there is, naturally, a good deal in the army; but it is most often ill-informed, emotional, and based on prejudice, despite the efforts of the Army Bureau of Current Affairs. However, those of us who were tending to rigid political orthodoxy in one direction or another are receiving a valuable lesson, too—that there are a number of widely held political attitudes and dogmas not reckoned with in the smart modern text-books and pamphlets. Perhaps we can best sum up our lesson as the realization of the profound importance of the individual.

I want now to consider briefly the "cultural" impact of service life. (I have discussed this more fully, by the way, in an article, as yet unpublished, called "For All Good Men," which readers of Library Views-letter may shortly see.) My more constant readers will remember my conception of the librarian-as-artist; and it is the position of the artist in war-time that interests me most. Perhaps I may be forgiven for discussing this problem in general terms and not with particular reference to librarianship?

First some deductions:

(i) The intellectual results of war service are for the moment mainly negative ones. The diminution or complete disappearance of cultural resources and machinery *can*, of course, lead to a much less crowded æsthetic or intellectual life, with more time for thought and so possible to a deeper if more narrow range of mental experience. (ii) The consistent successful practice of an art by serving men in war-time is impossible, except by accident. (iii) The one positive gain is in variety of experience, and this is a gain only in so far as it can be crystallized into art as soon as artists are free and able to create once more.

I think these deductions are borne out by events. If I may be so arrogant, I can cite my own case as that of a poet whose sensibility as an artist has been anaesthetized, as it were, by the army. I *could* write, certainly, but experience has shown me that I should write badly, superficially, and dishonestly—and so I refrain. And taking the measure of the

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bulk of verse written by servicemen, judging indeed by the state or most other war-time arts, I think I am correct in not writing. And yet I feel that the varied external experience is going to be valuable: I have hopes that we may be able to develop after the war a more " popular " but still valid art; it should at least be in the hands of men with more honesty of thought and a much fuller vitality than their immediately pre-war selves. With the salty bawdiness and lively vulgarity of the barrack-room added to his other apperceptions, it seems to me the artist cannot fail to have benefited. This is equally true of the librarian-as-artist; and even true of the plain " business-man " librarian, who should at least get a stronger head for the heights of censorship and book-selection !

Glancing through an old notebook, I find this passage, which dates from the summer of 1940, when I took a sunnier view of the army than I do now: ". . . the individual and the integrity of the individual are of the utmost importance in the struggle. For soldier and civilian alike, the only amenities that cannot be touched are reading and sex. And reading is more than ever the biggest single factor for intellectual good or evil: the conclusion hardly needs to be drawn that therefore librarians have to carry an immense responsibility. And yet it is worth drawing, and it is worthy of all emphasis, because even now librarians seem to think much more about librarianship than about libraries. This is merely foolish, and is confusing ends and means; and is doubly foolish at this time, when clear thinking and singleness of mind may make all the difference between victory and defeat. Librarians, practising or in the forces, have a duty to themselves, and through themselves to society, to fashion for themselves in the forge of war and beat out on the anvil of experience, a strong and pliant culture. This is their surest weapon."

In apposition to this rather Churchillian " purple passage," the preceding remarks may sound cynical and despondent, but in fact they do no more than reflect a more mature view. It may be remarked that this is in no way consistent with the " passivity " mentioned earlier on; to which I answer that (thank God !) I am not a consistent being and have naturally taken a middle course between my earlier optimism and the implied pessimism of these pages.

Instead of a peroration, I will end on a note of justification with some lines from W. R. Rodgers:

" You will be more free
At the thoughtless centre of slaughter than you would be
Standing chained to the telephone end while the world cracks."

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The Art of Recommending Books

K. C. Harrison

ACCORDING to Mr. Savage, the art of recommending books is not to recommend them. He says this, or something like this, in his *Special librarianship*, which is far and away the best book on English librarianship published in the last ten years. My title, deliberately chosen in the face of his dictum, has, I expect, shown that I do not agree with him. Moreover, Mr. Savage does not always agree with himself, for after forbidding the recommending of books, he has to admit that he has shown books to readers, and, when questioned as to their worth, has replied that the books were "well spoken of." In effect, he recommends books. But how timidly! How silently and with how wan a face! And how disappointing such a sterile comment must be to the increasing number of readers who are coming to regard librarians as people who know something about books!

Compilers of booklists have already found it necessary, when annotating, to introduce what is known as evaluative comment, but what I regard merely as the human touch. There was a pitched battle in the professional journals, as Stanley Snaith will tell you, before the right to be human became as tacitly acknowledged as it is to-day. I hope we are not going to have another bout of verbal fisticuffs before we can assert the best method of introducing books to readers, what Mr. Savage calls exposition. But surely it is not enough to describe book after book as being "well spoken of." Certainly there will be occasions when staff may find it safer and more prudent to take refuge in some such innocuous comment, and I am coming to that later, but meanwhile I plead for the humanizing of book recommendation and offer some advice for the interested.

The art of recommending books is but part of a larger consideration, that of personal service to readers. Few subjects have been treated so largely, and few subjects have been treated so ineptly, both from the psychological and practical standpoints. The trouble has been that librarians have shown themselves incapable of putting themselves in the place of readers. Consequently, the subject has been consistently treated from the librarian's viewpoint only. There is room for a comprehensive essay on service to readers, written by a librarian imaginative enough to be able to walk into his own library in the attitude of one of his readers.

To return to the specific question of the exposition of books. If I were a reader, eager to realize the resources of my public library, I should certainly expect from the staff, in addition to ordinary courtesy, a special-

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ized knowledge of, and an enthusiasm for the books in the library. I should not be so unreasonable as to expect the staff as a whole to form an encyclopaedia of the actual subjects comprising all knowledge. If they did there would be no need for the books in the library, but in any case I should resent such omniscience. What I should expect to find would be a 99 per cent. knowledge of the *books* in the library.

Alas ! librarians and their assistants are very far from this high state of efficiency. How many times have we all overheard or even taken our part in such a conversation as the following :

Reader : Which is the best of these books on sheet-metal work ?

Librarian (ignorant, desperate, unconvincing) : Well, er, let me see, I think Robinson's book is the best.

Such answers are quite worthless, and may often be criminally, though not intentionally, misleading. Yet is there any reason why, because a librarian naturally knows nothing of sheet-metal work, he should not, after several years' work in a library, know something about the *books* on sheet-metal work ? And, knowing something about the bibliography of this particular subject, why should he hesitate to recommend ? A librarian deals with books, and if he knows the bibliography of a subject, he is qualified to recommend books, however little he knows about the actual subject. Because I know little about Mozart, that would not prevent me from recommending Eric Blom's book to a reader.

In a previous article ("Staff meetings," *L.A.R.*, 1937), I tried to demonstrate how service to the public might be improved if the staff were ready to co-operate. Making use of the same willing co-operation, the idea of the staff of a library forming a human general bibliography of books becomes well within possible bounds. It can be partially accomplished by marshalling and putting to good use the special interests of individual members of the staff. For instance, if an assistant has a knowledge of music, he should be given the privilege of dealing with all music queries. A genuine librarian-cum-musician would regard it as a privilege and not as work. I am speaking now of a small or medium-sized general public library. With a staff of twenty or so, one might reasonably expect that some forty subjects of varying breadth and importance might be covered thoroughly. Many others could be covered less thoroughly, but satisfactorily. This only relates to subjects, of which the staff, through at least one of their number, would have some actual knowledge, as well as bibliographical knowledge. The librarian should then detail the readers' adviser, who would still be in existence for answering ordinary questions, to bring together specialist readers and their counterparts on the staff.

An effort should then be made that the many general and important

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subjects unknown to the librarian and his assistants should be studied bibliographically. Each assistant should be allotted several subjects to study in this way. With the use of bibliographies and the study of specialist journals, it should not take long to acquire a working knowledge of the literature of a strange subject. Added encouragement would be offered if the librarian allowed his specialist assistants at least to recommend desirable books for purchase. The result of this scheme would be the desired one of a staff of specialist bibliographers. With such a staff in being, its full mental resources could be utilized for the purpose of ensuring for the public a more intelligent service than they are receiving at the present time.

The classification scheme and its adjunct the catalogue are the machines for helping readers find the books they want. But, as aids, they are mere automatas. Specialist bibliographers would provide the human touch. The bigot and the pedant will, I know, be outraged, maintaining that the job of a librarian is not to sell books but merely to issue them. Far from suggesting that librarians should become a race of commercial travellers, I do hold that we have a higher destiny than the mechanical issue of books. We must get knowledge of books, and then we shall be able to recommend, with some authority, all classes of books. There are dangers, of course, but given a stable and thoughtful staff, axe-grinding would be rare. If discovered, it should be discouraged by the librarian in no uncertain terms. As for Mr. Savage's terror of pestering readers, a little tact and some experience will soon show the staff who and who not to work upon. I admit that these dangers are real. But they are surmountable. And if specialist bibliographers will tend to humanize relations between staff and readers, as I think they will, then they will be worth trying. As I see it, there is a crusty patina of studious unenthusiasm stifling our potentialities. We must chip it off before we become hopelessly stodgy.

Students' Problems

A. J. Walford

THE writing of text-books, it has been said, resembles nothing so much as the continual pouring of ink from one bottle into another.

This seems to be borne out by the recent complaint made by a student that the text-books for the study of Literary History, both elementary and advanced, tend to be dull and largely factual. The remedy is, surely, to rely on the text-book only as providing the necessary frame-

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work and emphasizing the high-lights, and to get as near the original as possible. To the advanced student in particular I would appeal to make ample use of the Clarendon English Series, especially for the set period, 1785-1835. These volumes, covering some twenty-five leading men of letters, consist of representative prose and verse extracts (as the case may be) from their works, with appreciative essays, almost invariably by other famous men of letters. The work of such voluminous and unequal poets as Wordsworth responds to such treatment; moreover, the criticism is never far removed from the original—and the two should go hand in hand. There is something deadly dull, agreed, in the painstaking reiteration of facts in text-books on a subject which should be the most stimulating of all the student's studies. Turn, however, to Macaulay's essays on Byron, Bunyan, Johnson, and Goldsmith and a lively, indelible impression of these writers remains (condensed versions of the essays on Johnson and Goldsmith appear in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 11th edition, and are thoroughly worth the perusal of the Elementary student). Few have written better than Coleridge and Hazlitt of the Elizabethans, while there is a penetrating estimate of Thackeray in Trollope's *Autobiography*. And so one might go on.

I think the average assistant should be encouraged to do a little research work on his own account, and these are profitable examples. Not only will he be killing two birds with one stone (learning something tangible about the writer of the essay as well as of his subject), but he will have become acquainted with the English style of a master hand. Perhaps more attention to such readings could be paid in future syllabuses and set work.

My remarks in the November ASSISTANT on the relationship between student, tutor, and examiner has provoked a certain amount of correspondence, including a letter from "Eratosthenes" which I will quote in full:

" Does the writer of the Students' Problems in the November issue of THE ASSISTANT realize that studying for examinations is not the full-time occupation of the Library Assistant ?

" For the Library Assistant there are three methods of study :

" (1) *Classes*.—From our own experience, we find that classes are only held where there are a certain number of students, and because of the low number of passes from the Elementary Examination there are not enough students to justify holding classes for the Intermediate Examination.

" (2) *Correspondence Courses*.—Ten months are spent in writing answers to question papers which take all the available time of the course. Thus ' cramming ' is necessary in the last two months if the student hopes to gain a pass.

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"(3) *Studying Alone.*—This means that one 'crams' for at least six months instead of the two months necessitated by the Correspondence Course. Surely this 'hurrying through a course in six months' is better than wasting the six months that must elapse between the publishing of the Examination Results and the commencement of a Correspondence Course, especially considering that eighteen months must elapse between the examinations.

Other points from this article

"(1) Two of the most discouraging factors in these examinations are (a) the small percentage of passes compared with Public Examinations—is then the average intelligence of the Library Assistant so low? (b) The syllabus required to be covered in all Library Association Examinations is very wide and the choice of the questions very small, especially when many of these questions deal with obscure and comparatively unimportant points.

"(2) Naturally the economic factor is of great importance as one cannot take a new post away from home until at least the Intermediate Examination is gained, as in all advertisements the salary offered is based upon the qualifications demanded.

"In spite of the bugbear of examinations we remain enthusiastic and interested Library Assistants.

"If the statements of the writer of the article are too sweeping, we hope that our reply is not too downright to be aired in the LIBRARY ASSISTANT."

That study for examinations is the full-time occupation of the library assistant was never assumed. But it *was* assumed that "Students' Problems" is devoted to the question of studies and is intended to ventilate ideas on the subject of examinations. Am I wrong? It seems a pity that my remarks should have savoured of the examination-fiend when I was at such pains to speak of degrees as being, possibly, superficial qualifications. Another statement of mine was that "the assistant who rises high in the profession does so almost in spite of examination successes, does so because he or she is an enthusiast first and foremost. . . ."

Classes.—It is true that the formation of classes of less than eight members is often frowned upon by the authorities running them, but this is no reason why a co-operative effort could not be made (a) by students in neighbouring districts, to amalgamate and so reach the desired number for a class; (b) by a body of students appointing their own tutors (I have very pleasant memories of being invited to conduct such a course in a south-coast town; the students, some of whom came from other towns,

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cheerfully paid my travelling expenses, which were not inconsiderable). What can be done by enthusiastic efforts in one quarter can surely be done elsewhere, although present-day conditions will probably rule out such ideas for the time being.

So far as London is concerned, at least, there is no lack of facilities for classes in the Elementary and Intermediate; the North-Western Polytechnic, West Ham Municipal College, and Croydon, Fulham, Brixton, and Catford are, between them, accessible from any quarter.

Correspondence Courses.—"Eratosthenes" seems completely ignorant of the idea behind correspondence work. Does he imagine that the average student spends the ten months of the course doing nothing but "writing answers to question papers which take all the available time of the course"? Such things as assimilation of details and application of principles as the course proceeds are apparently unknown! In my own experience, if a student has to cram (not revise) at the end of a course, it is largely because he has not been honest with himself or his tutor during the previous ten months. "Eratosthenes" does not seem to realize that a good deal of interchange of ideas and settling of queries and side-issues goes on during this intensive period of writing. There should, of course, be personal contact, whenever possible, between tutor and student, and it was partly for this reason that the Chaucer House revision school was instituted.

Studying Alone.—Consideration of this might also cover the whole question of "cramming." As an examiner I realize only too well that this gorging process, followed by mental indigestion and lack of coherent thought, is the origin of many a stereotyped answer. Time and time again, asked to discuss the place of X in the development of the English novel, the student will write, with little or no commentary, the life and works of X, and leave it at that. Persuasive writing and reasoned discussion will nearly always elude the aspirant who writes perfunctory answers throughout a correspondence course and at the end makes a desperate spurt and "crams" what he should previously have digested.

It is lamentable that "Eratosthenes" should regard Studying Alone as one gargantuan "cram." Professional education is going to be a very poor thing and produce very few specialists if study has to be equated to such methods. And need the period between sitting for one examination and taking a correspondence course for another be a wasted six months? Is the average student utterly without a plan in these matters?—I think not. Allow a discreet—and necessary—interval of, say, one month to elapse after the examination, and then start picking up fresh threads.—One round of the pursuit of examinations, "Eratosthenes" will say.—Not at all. The examination is a means to an end, and it is at least a

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challenge to one's mental fitness and ability to put pen to paper and write convincingly.

Other Points.—What does my critic mean by "Public Examinations"?—University entrance examinations, such as Matriculation? If so, there seems little basis for comparison with Library Association examinations, in which few candidates have had the opportunity for oral tuition. Again, University examinations are often taken internally, which should partly explain the lower percentage of passes in library examinations. I suggest, too, that a number of students, denying themselves correspondence courses or classes, undertake our examinations far too light-heartedly.

As to the very wide syllabus, "Eratosthenes" merely underlines my own remarks and plea for a rationalized Elementary Literary History syllabus. That many questions "deal with obscure and comparatively unimportant points" is not an opinion I can accept, the difficult paper being an exception. More time might be allowed in the case of the Practical Cataloguing Paper, in which there is so much sheer writing to be done, but I see no general ground for complaint. May not inadequate preparation be the more logical cause of failure?

Another letter mentions a point with which I did not deal—time for study during library hours. With the present restricted hours of opening at present in vogue, I hardly think this is the time to broach such matters with one's Chief: he will probably be quite unsympathetic. Study is one of those things which we fit as best we can into an exacting round. "The upshot of it all is, of course," writes my correspondent, "that we must cram our examination work into evenings and Sundays—and this, invariably, on top of some war-time task, such as serving in a canteen, or, on raid nights, fire-watching." While I cannot anticipate any concessions being made in the present emergency, surely much could be done if some responsible persons were elected to coach and direct studies. Why not put the matter to one's seniors or to the local A.A.L. Division?

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On the Editor's Table

CORBETT, EDMUND V. *The Illustrations collection: its formation, classification, and exploitation.* 1941. Pp. 158. Grafton. 10s. 6d.

THIS attractively produced book will prove a boon to those who contemplate the formation of an illustrations collection, apart from the fact that it fills a gap in the literature of librarianship. The eight plates are excellent of their kind, while the text-matter itself covers the ground intensively. American as well as British practice is carefully reviewed. Especially noteworthy are the chapters on Selection and source of supply, Issue methods, and Classification. There is, however, no mention of the Essex County methods of issuing prints, etc., in metal tubes, and one is rather surprised at the scantiness of the bibliography, which does not include periodical articles. But these are slight objections to a thoroughly good piece of work.

DEWEY, JOHN. *Education to-day; edited and with a foreword by Joseph Ratner.* Pp. xiv, 86. Allen & Unwin. 5s.

It is forty-two years since John Dewey, the great American educationist wrote his *School and society*. A life-long enemy of formalism, Dewey conceived education as a form of experience—not a preparation for life, but life itself unfolding, and the school—not as a constricting influence on youthful spirits, but itself a form of community life. As the writer of the foreword puts it, "education has always occupied the central plain in Dewey's philosophy of democracy." To harness the impulses of childhood rather than to suppress them, to substitute practical experience for theoretical knowledge, these are commonplaces of educational theory to-day, but they were revolutionary ideas in the 'nineties.

This small volume consists of reprints of six articles by John Dewey, published between 1897 and 1908, and they cover his main tenets, including the famous "Articles of faith," "My pedagogic creed."

THORNTON, JOHN L. *The Chronology of librarianship: an introduction to the history of libraries and book-collecting.* 1941. Pp. ix, 254. Grafton. 12s. 6d.

As Mr. Thornton himself admits, "there is little original matter in this volume." Part I covers the history of librarianship in narrative form, while Part II (pp. 145-220) is the chronology proper, extending to 1939. This is followed by a useful bibliography of some 115 items, and a full index.

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While a work of this kind, calling for inspired hack-work (which need not be used in a derogatory sense), can be extremely useful, it is of little moment unless it is done really thoroughly. The materials to be drawn from are more or less at hand, and they should have been adequately drawn upon. While this is fairly true of the earlier centuries in Mr. Thornton's chronology, it certainly does not apply to the twentieth century. Nor is much attention paid to the progress of American librarianship. No mention is made of Library of Congress printed cards, an idea exploited by the Library Bureau in 1895, and adopted by the American Library Association in 1898, the cards themselves being distributed from 1901 onwards. In 1936 the National Library of Peiping adopted the idea. Indiana, the pioneer of the American county library system (1816), should also have been noted. It is curious, too, to find entries of celebrities in the chronology under year of birth; surely the period of their flourishing (*i.e.* when they became librarians of important libraries) is more useful?

Less than two pages is devoted to the period 1930-38—an almost unpardonable scamping. It is chiefly with this in mind that I offer the following few additions:

1904. Library of Congress Classification: first outline issued.
1915. *World list of scientific periodicals.*
- 1927-33. Brussels Expansion of Dewey: full edition (English translation in progress).
1928. Merrill's *Code for classifiers.*
1931. British Museum Author Catalogue (new edition) begins publication.
1933. Local Government Act for England and Wales (mentioning library provisions). Dewey Classification taken over by Library of Congress experts.
1934. Library Association Rules Committee set up to collaborate with a similar committee set up by the American Library Association in revising the Anglo-American Code.
1936. British Museum Cataloguing Rules, revised edition.
1937. Cheltenham Classification (Misses Fegan and Cant).

The second edition of this work, it is hoped, will repair some of the many modern omissions.

A. J. W.

The Library Assistant Correspondence

EDINBURGH PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

SIR,—

NATIONAL SURVEY

As a result of protests from the A.A.L. and from me the Emergency Committee have decided that Mr. McColvin's report shall be regarded as his report and not theirs. The Report as submitted by him will be published as soon as possible. The Emergency Committee, when sending it out, may make comments upon it. If the Committee wish to take any action upon the report they "will take every practicable step to obtain and act upon the views of the majority of the members. Such steps may if necessary include the conducting of a postal ballot." Further, it was resolved that a meeting of the Council should discuss the Report "at the earliest opportunity."

So far good. But why should not the comments, and the action recommended, be the work of the Council rather than of the Emergency Committee? Or is it the intention to call the Council only after the members, prompted by the Committee, have expressed their views? Such a course of action certainly will not do. Mr. W. B. Paton, Hon. Secretary of the Scots L.A., informs me that Mr. McColvin has given the Council of the S.L.A. "an assurance that any proposals arising out of his visits which affect Scottish public libraries would be submitted to the Council of the S.L.A. before any action was taken." But not before the Council of the L.A., surely?

Again, on what is the postal ballot to be taken? On the report, and the Committee's comments and recommendations? Are the members to have no opportunity of proposing fresh or counter proposals? Are they to vote simply "yes" or "no" to proposals which cannot be amended or added to? That course of action will never do. The report, after it has been considered by the *Council*, should be issued, and comments upon the proposals should be invited, so that they may be considered at a subsequent meeting of the Council. Then and then only should a vote be taken.

Another point. What is done now may affect the future of many librarians now in the Forces. Are they to have an opportunity of expressing their opinions? How will their vote be taken?

Yours faithfully,

ERNEST A. SAVAGE.

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CENTRAL LIBRARY,
SHOREDITCH,

15th December, 1941.

THE EDITOR,
THE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

DEAR SIR,—

Mr. Shepherd's wise letter in the December ASSISTANT would have been more disturbing had some action not already been taken. As far as London Region is concerned, a number of Librarians—in co-operation with the much-maligned but not entirely futile Ministry of Information—have perfected their plans, to meet invasion or other grave emergencies which may cause destruction or interruption of normal services such as press, telephone, wireless, and rail and road transport.

The maintenance of public morale—and I doubt if it needs much maintenance after our experience last winter—through the distribution of propaganda, public meetings, film shows, book and photographic exhibitions, and shelter welfare work, marches alongside such emergency preparedness, and is but part of the task of educating the public in the wider aspects of the war which many Librarians as Local Information Secretaries have been actively carrying out for the past eighteen months. Mr. Shepherd may safely contemplate the future in the knowledge that the turbulent present is not being neglected.

As far as Governments are concerned, the form these take after the war is of small consequence to the Library Movement, which is likely to be as permanent and progressive as the ideas it serves as a channel to distribute. Some librarians, it is true, may not come back, but—as after the last war—a new generation will take over. A few libraries may have to close their doors—the bombers have closed more than a few already, including my Central Library and half my Haggerston Library—but the threat to the continuance of the Library Movement as a whole is negligible. Those of us who have been halved, quartered, or even decapitated can still turn to other resources, such as Youth Committee Club Libraries, Shelter Libraries, and Emergency School Libraries, and give them direct service.

I advise Mr. Shepherd not to be discouraged concerning the present, but to work for that future which is his—and his younger colleagues—to create.

Yours faithfully,

C. M. JACKSON.

The Library Assistant

Current Books: The War

C. G. GREY. *Bombers*. Faber. 6s.

THIS is not only a catalogue of the bombers of the R.A.F., but a miniature history of aviation firms and Air Force policy. The editor of the *Aeroplane* has plenty of "gen": he speaks out and criticizes freely. Some of his conclusions seem quite wrong-headed (his estimation of Russian strength and his remarks on pamphlet raids): but this is a valuable little book, well illustrated.

HANS HABE. *A Thousand shall fall*. Harrap. 10s. 6d.

The story starts on the first day of the German offensive on France; each day brings some new retreat, some new treachery, confusion leads to chaos, treachery leads to surrender. Habe finds himself in a prison-camp under an assumed name, and gradually works himself into the confidence of the officers. The story of his escape must be read to be believed. A finely written book, and the best on the fall of France so far.

E. HAUGE. *Odds against Norway*. Lindsay Drummond. 7s. 6d.

Another of the excellent books this publisher is giving us on the impact of war on the smaller European countries. The author describes the heroic but hopeless efforts of the small Norwegian Army to overcome the surprise of the Nazi invasion; the retreats, the waiting in snowy valleys, the frustrated hopes of British support, the confusion; ending with escape to Scotland. A tense personal narrative this, full of interest.

MAURICE HINDUS. *Russia fights on*. Collins. 8s. 6d.

If anyone knows the Russian people it is Hindus; here he shows us the new Russia, the advances in education, agriculture, and industrialization. These advances are the reasons for the resistance of the U.S.S.R.; the workers and peasants own their country, are proud of their freedom, and would die rather than lose it. "Russia is unbeatable," says Hindus.

THOMAS KERNAN. *Report on France*. Lane. 10s. 6d.

The author, an American, edited *Vogue* in Paris; but he gives us a great deal more than a *Vogue*'s-eye view of the Nazi domination in Occupied France. The propaganda, the ingenious currency swindles, the "persuasion" of French manufacturers to do German work; all are set down with documentary evidence. A good book, sober in its facts, tragic in its implication of the end of a great democracy.

The Library Assistant

JANE NICHOLSON. *Shelter.* Harrap. 7s. 6d.

A novel of the Blitz in London. Although the world of Jos and Louise seems to be exclusively that of Mayfair (the delights of Prunier's shelter supper-room are well described) the story does represent something of what London felt. The characters are very alive and the tension, exhaustion, and horror they went through are very real. Irritating deletions by the Censor for unknown reasons.

"STRATEGICUS." *From Tobruk to Smolensk.* Faber. 10s. 6d.

Perhaps there are too many war commentaries being written; but this, the third instalment by the Military Correspondent of the *Spectator*, is far and away the best of them. His estimates are shrewd; he indulges in no vain praise of victories; he analyses the strengths of the opposing armies in a convincing manner. In this book he outlines the Libyan, Balkan, Cretan, and the beginning of the Russian campaigns in a fashion that will make Everyman his own Clausewitz.

Air Power and Civilization

By M. J. BERNARD DAVY. An authoritative historical survey, with a severe indictment of the way man has used flight, and interesting suggestions for future development. Illustrated 8s 6d net

Plan for Africa

By RITA HINDEN. This Fabian Society Colonial Bureau report demands the spending of large sums in furnishing the peoples of our Colonial Empire with essential public services. Introduction by A. Creech Jones, M.P. Maps 7s 6d net

The Awakening of Western Legal Thought

By MAX HAMBURGER. Revealing the heritage of ancient thought on Law and the State, and on Right and Wrong, the author contends that it is education which enables man properly to grasp the concept of law and justice. 10s 6d net

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